DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 373 CG 024 282

AUTHOR Niebrzydowski, Leon
TITLE Self-Esteem and the Nature of Interpersonal Relationships in Developing Youth.
PUB DATE Aug 90
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Self-Esteem (1st, Asker, Norway, August 9-12, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Foreign Countries; *Friendship; *Interpersonal Relationship; Personality Traits; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Students; *Self Esteem
IDENTIFIERS *Poland

ABSTRACT

This study attempted to define the character of interpersonal relationships with close friends and social acquaintances according to the level of the individual's self-esteem. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds in Lodz, Poland (N=97) completed the Polish language version of the Adjective Check List and the Acquaintance Description Form. Based on their responses, students (90% of whom came from professional or managerial families) were classified as having high, medium, or low levels of self-esteem. The results indicated that all subjects had relations with either a close friend (70%) or social acquaintance (30%), usually a same-sex peer (80%). No significant relation was noted between the levels of self-esteem and the endurance of the bond. There was a statistically significant correlation (P 0.01) between the level of self-esteem and the intensity of positive attitudes toward the partners such that the higher the level of self-esteem, the higher the intensity of positive attitudes toward the partners. There was a distinctive, however small, correlation between the degree of self-esteem and the strength of the relationship; the higher the level of self-esteem, the stronger were the ties and bonds between partners. Relationships between friends with high self-esteem tended to have a higher rewarding value than did relationships between low self-esteem individuals. Compared to individuals with low self-esteem, those with high self-esteem perceived their relationships with close friends and social acquaintances as less conflicting and easier to maintain and displayed higher intensity of positive emotional reactions. (NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED346373

SELF-ESTEEM AND THE NATURE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN DEVELOPING YOUTH

Leon Niebrzydowski
Department of Psychology
University of Lodz, Poland

Self-esteem has been viewed as a generalized attitude that the individual has toward himself (Coopersmith, 1967; Wyle, 1979; Kozielecki, 1981). This attitude entails several components; cognitive, emotional, and evaluative, and has a regulatory force. Even though it may not be among the most important factors that influence an individual's behavior, it is likely to play an essential role in some spheres of human activity.

The effect that self-esteem may have upon an individual's social functioning is expressed in the way that it defines the manner in which the individual performs some social functions within their immediate social group and their acceptance or rejection of other social groups. Self-esteem also determines the nature, type, and progress of the relationships formed between the individual and others. The effect depends upon the degree, or level, of self-esteem which is measured by the amount of discrepancy between the so-called "real-self", one's real concept of self, and the "idealized-self", a perfected and lofty characterization of self in the sense of what one would like to become.

A high degree of discrepancy between the "real-self" and the "idealized-self" reflects a low level of self-esteem, whereas a low degree of discrepancy between the two forms of self-awareness indicates high self-esteem (Lukaszewski, 1978). High self-esteem

CG024282

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Leon Niebrzydowski
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

is a factor which motivates one's social activities and initiative, inspires one to enter into new relations with others, and creates favorable conditions for the development of wholesome and mature inter-personal relations. It permits a maximization of joint outcomes within a context of cooperation and trust, and encourages continuing mutual exploration of additional, as yet unrealized, outcome possibilities in the relationship. Performing acts of kindness for others and showing confidence in them is likely to contribute to an increase and tightening prior existing friendship ties between individuals.

A stable level of self-esteem, characterized by one's self-reliance and belief in one's trustworthiness, and one's strong motivation for action and need for achievement, helps to avoid or resolve conflict as it occurs in relations with others thus protecting the relationship from disintegration. It helps one to deal with tensions and makes the relationship indissoluble and immune against future failure (Kozielecki, 1981; Zaborowski, 1976).

Individuals with low self-esteem will display some negative attitudes toward themselves, lack confidence in their talents and abilities, have feelings of worthlessness, lack motivation for action, assume a posture of submission, display a tendency to resign from a number of tasks, and are likely to withdraw from collective undertakings and cooperation. This may lead to a considerable limitation of their social contacts, restricting those contacts to a small group with possible eventual isolation.

The negative attitude one has toward oneself, which is manifested in distrust, suspiciousness, and criticism of others impedes relationships making it difficult for an individual to overcome the distance that separates themselves from other people. It is also responsible for conflicts with others in social settings. Loss of motivation, indecisiveness, constant negative expectations, and lack of incentive are additional indicators of low self-esteem. Combined, these which make it difficult for an individual to resolve tensions within themselves as well as conflicts in relationships with others and may consequently cause the disintegration of the relationships. A more thorough treatment of this problem can be found in the works of Kozielecki (1981), Reykowski (1975), and Zaborowski (1976).

Objectives of the study

This study attempted to define the character of interpersonal relationships with close friends and social acquaintances according to the level of one's self-esteem. Self-esteem was defined as the degree of discrepancy between the "real-self", one's real concept of self, and "idealized-self", a perfected characterization of self. Based upon this concept of self-esteem three hypotheses were made. First, there is a link between the degree of self-esteem and the intensity of positive attitudes toward a partner in friendship relations. The higher one's self-esteem is, the stronger are the emotional ties and sense of commitment with other persons.

Second, there is a connection between the degree of self-

esteem and the strength of bonds with close friends. Persons with high self-esteem tend to be involved in relationships which are founded upon stronger interpersonal ties than individuals with low self-esteem. Third, there is a difference in the character of relations between person characterized by high and low degrees of self-esteem: 1) Interpersonal relations maintained by high self-esteem individuals have a higher rewarding value than the relations between persons with low self-esteem; 2) The relationships are long lasting, more difficult to break off, and easier to maintain; and, 3) The relations have a higher intensity of positive emotional responses and a stronger sense of commitment toward others. Individuals with high self-esteem fail to see the relationships with their close friends as being exclusive dyadic arrangements.

Methodology

The following techniques were used in this study: 1) Polish language version of the Adjective Check List (ACL) as adapted by Z. Pluzek; and 2) Acquaintance Description Form (ADF-F) developed by Paul Wright. Both techniques have been used extensively by psychologists in Poland to measure personality traits.

In this study two identical sets of ACL tests, consisting of 300 adjectives each, were used to define the degree of self-esteem in a group of young people. On the first inventory the respondents checked those adjectives which they considered to be descriptive of their "real-self": What I am really like. The second inventory was used to describe their idealized, or desired,

image of themselves: What I would like to be like.

The ADF technique was constructed by Paul Wright (1981), an American psychologist, based upon his theoretical model of friendship and acquaintanceship (Niebrzydowski, 1983). The theory, based upon the concept of "me", the aspect of self, as well as the motivation oriented toward one's self, defines friendship as a relationship between persons who establish rapport with each other. Their interactions are voluntary and unconstrained, and the persons involved accept each other as distinct individuals rather than as stereotypes of defined social roles. Thus, they interact with the underlying, or actual, personality of their partners (Wright, 1984).

This setting for this study was one of the secondary schools of general education in Lodz, Poland. The survey was administered to 97 students (55 females and 42 males) between the ages of 16 and 17 years. Based upon classification of their parents' occupation, 90% of the group came from professional, or managerial, families. The remaining 10% came from a working class background. This ratio, 9:1, is presented as being representative of Polish secondary schools of general education.

Results

The degree of self-esteem in the survey is an independent variable that is measured by the Gough and Heilbrunn ACL. The list was used to determine the level of divergence between "real-self" and "idealized-self" expressed by the index D of the ACL. The value of index D notes the degree of self-esteem with higher

values of D being descriptive of a higher level of discrepancy between the "real-self" and the "idealized-self" with resultant lower degree of self-esteem.

The ACL was used to determine the distribution characteristics of low, medium, and high levels of self-esteem within the student population in order to develope a representative sample of the population. The computed mean (X = 13.65) and standard deviation (S = 3.85) of the sample were used to compute the levels of self-esteem for the sample group in the following manner:

High	Medium	Low
X - 1/2 S	> P <	X + 1/2 S
11.72	> P <	15.58
11.72	13.65	15.58

The distribution of self-esteem for the sample group is displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Distribution of level of self-esteem

Self-esteem	High	Medium	Low	Total
Number of cases in the sample	34	31	32	97
Percent in category	35.05%	31.96%	32.99%	100%

The distribution of scores in the sample is as follows: High self-esteem - scores ranged from 7.35 to 11.72; Medium self-esteem - scores ranged from 11.73 to 15.58; and Low self-esteem - scores

ranged from 15.59 to 22.93. The division of the sample into 3 groups of High, Medium, and Low levels of self-esteem has been made exclusively for the purpose of the study because there are no accepted norms for the index D. The comparison was made to show the effects of differing degrees of self-esteem in the sample even though this division can be viewed as arbitrary. The distribution of self-esteem scores within the sample approximates the normal distributions which was shown by a test of significance.

Self-esteem and the general nature of the relationship between close friends and social acquaintances.

The main hypothesis concerns the relation between the degrees of self-esteem and the nature of bonds with friends. The characteristics investigated are: the nature of rewards and the level of rewarding; the formation and endurance of the relationship; the level of complementarity of proffered stances and the intensity or flexibility with which they are held; the level of conflict in the relationship; the intensity of positive emotional responses toward the partner in the relationship; and the degree to which the relationship is viewed as being exclusive dyadic. The hypothesis is founded upon the assumption that self-esteem influences the social functioning of an individual since an objective respect, or realistically favorable impression, that one has of themselves affects the formation, progress, and the character of interpersonal relations. It has been assumed that high self-esteem is conducive to the formation of more positive, less conflicting, and therefore more durable and rewarding

interpersonal relationships, with stronger emotional ties one's partner without seeing the relationship as being exclusively dyadic.

To verify the hypotheses the mean values for scales measuring the above characteristics have been compared and estimated independently for the individuals with low and high levels of self-esteem. This data are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

The mean values for questionnaire ADF-F measuring the nature of relations between friends with low and high levels of self-esteem.

Mean of ADF-F Scale	Level of self-esteem		Significance Level
	Low	High	
Measure of interpersonal rewarding	95.84	106.71	t = 2.847, P<0.01
Endurance of relationship	16.81	18.90	t = 1.719
Measure of tensions and shocks	11.19	9.47	t = 2.080, P<0.05
Emotional expression	15.59	18.63	t = 2.211, P<0.05
Exclusiveness	12.85	12.32	t = 0.417

From the data in Table 2 we see that there exists statistically significant differences between the individuals with high and low degrees of self-esteem as regards:

the measure of interpersonal rewarding /P<0/01/;

the measure of tensions and shocks /P<0.05/;

the emotional expression scale /P<0.05/.

There are no statistically significant differences, however,

between the sample groups with respect to endurance and exclusiveness of relationship.

Some tentative conclusions may be drawn from these findings: 1) Individuals with high self-esteem tend to perceive their relationships as more rewarding than do those with low self-esteem; 2) There is lower potential for conflict and tension in interpersonal relations among individuals with high self-esteem; 3) Individuals with high self-esteem show more positive emotional reactions toward their partners than do those with low self-esteem; 4) Relationships between good friends and social acquaintances with high and low degrees of self-esteem do not vary as regards the endurance of relationship. This can be accounted for by the fact that individuals with low degree of self-esteem, though more inclined to resignation and difficulty in resolving conflicts, suffer from social inhibitions and the lack of the initiative to form relationships with others. As a result, they may tend to consolidate and develope the already existing relationships with others in order to avoid the necessity of forming new relation with which they generally have great difficulty. The degree of self-esteem is not a differentiating factor for young people with respect to their tendency to perceive the relationships as strictly and exclusively dyadic.

<u>The characteristics of relationships maintained by boys and girls with the same degree of self-esteem</u>

The last problem in the study deals with differences between boys and girls with the same levels of self-esteem in the

characteristics of their relationships. The thesis is that interpersonal relationships formed by boys and girls with the same levels of self-esteem will differ with regards to such characteristics as: the level of positive emotional reactions toward the partner (Emotional expression scale); the tendency to perceive the relationship as an exclusive one (Exclusiveness scale); and, the tendency to see the relations as providing security, a sense of confidence, safety, and freedom from fear and anxiety (Security scale).

To analyze this problem the mean values of the scales measuring the tendencies under discussion have been compared. The outcomes for boys and girls are shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

The mean values in the scales: Emotional expression, Exclusiveness, and Security values for high, medium, and low self-esteem by sex

Scale	Self-esteem	Sex	
		Girls	Boys
Distinctiveness of emotional expression	Low	18.44	12.75
	Medium	20.00	14.71
	High	20.59	16.67
Exclusiveness	Low	15.44	10.25
	Medium	14.88	9.21
	High	15.14	9.5
Security value	Low	21.56	19.88
	Medium	21.06	19.57
	High	20.91	21.58

There is a significant differences between the mean values of Distinctiveness of Emotional Expression of girls and boys with the

same degrees of self-esteem in each of the three cohorts. The significance of the differences is higher in the individuals with lower level of self-esteem /$P<0.01$/ than in the individuals with the higher or medium levels of self-esteem /$P<0.05$/. There is no significant difference between the mean values of the Security Value scale for the girls and boys with the same levels of self-esteem in each of the three sample groups.

The figures in the total column show that sex is a differentiating factor in individuals with the same level of self-esteem with regard to the degree of positive emotional responses toward their partners, as well as with regard to the tendency to perceive the relationships as strictly and exclusively dyadic. The girls are found to display more positive emotional reactions toward their partners and, in contrast to the boys, tend to see the relationships as strictly exclusive. Sex, however, is not a differentiating factor in the individuals with the same degrees of self-esteem with regard to perceiving the relations as ensuring security.

Summary and conclusions

The principal aim of this report was to find the connection between the levels of self-esteem and the characteristics of interpersonal relationships in developing youth. The hypothesis concerning the correlations between the degrees of self-esteem and the strength of bonds between friends have been verified, as well as the hypothesis concerning the correlation between the degrees of self-esteem and the nature of the relationship. The

characteristics of the relationship are: the nature and dimension of the interpersonal rewarding; the potentiality for conflicts and the difficulty in maintaining the relationship, its longevity and endurance, the intensity of positive reactions toward the partner and the tendency to perceive the relation as being exclusive dyadic.

Upon completion of the investigation it appears that:

1) All subjects involved in the study have relations either with a close friend (70%) or with a social acquaintance (30%). The relationships are established mainly with peers of the same sex (80%).;

2) No significant relation was noted between the levels of self-esteem and the endurance of the bond. Subjects with higher degrees of self-esteem tend to maintain the relationship with their close friends as often as those with low self-esteem.;

3) There is a statistically significant correlation /$P<0.01$/ between the level of self-esteem and the intensity of positive attitudes toward the partners in relations with close friends and social acquaintances. The higher the level of self-esteem the higher the intensity of positive attitudes toward the partner in the interpersonal relationship under discussion.;

4) There is a distinctive, however small, correlation /$P<0.01$/ between the degree of self-esteem and the strength of the relationship ($r = 0.30$). The higher the level of self-esteem the stronger are the ties and bonds between partners in the relationship.;

5) Relationships between friends with high self-esteem tend to have a higher rewarding value than do relationships between low self-esteem individuals.;

6) Individuals with high self-esteem perceive their relationships with close friends and social acquaintances as less conflicting and easier to maintain than do individuals with low self-esteem.;

7) Individuals with high self-esteem also display higher intensity of positive emotional reactions than do individuals with low self-esteem.; and,

8) Longevity and endurance of the friendly bonds in the relationship is the same for those with low and high levels of self-esteem.

References

Coopersmith, S. (1967). Antecedents of Self-esteem. San Francisco

Kozielecki, J. (1981). Psychologiczna teoria samowiedzy. (Psychological Theory of Self-recognition.) Warszawa, PWN.

Lukaszewski, W. (1978). Struktura "ja" a dzialanie w sytuacjach zadaniowych: Empiryczne studia nad funkcjonowaniem osohowosci. (The structure of "I": Acting in task-oriented situations.) Wroclaw, Wydawnictwo University, Wroclawskiego.

Niebrzydowski, L. (1983). Przyjazn i kolezenstwo mlodziezy dorastajacej. (Friendship and social acquaintanceship among developing youth.)

Reykowski, J. (1975). Zadania pozaosobiste jako regulator czynnosci. W I. Kurcz and J. Reykowski (Ed.) Studia nad teoria czynnosci ludzkich pod red. (Non-personal tasks as a regulator of activity. In I. Kurcz and J. Reykowski (Ed.) Studies in the theory of human activity.) Warszawa, PWN.

Wylie, R. (1979). The self-concept: Theory and research on selected topics. London: University of Nebraska

Zaborowski, Z. (1976). Stosunki miedzyludzkie. (Interpersonal relationships.) Wroclaw, Ossolineum.